TOWN OF STAR JUNCTION
Washington Coal and Coke Company
State Highway 51
Star Junction
Fayette County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-320

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

TOWN OF STAR JUNCTION
Washington Coal and Coke Company

HAER No. PA-320

Location:	State Highway 51, Star Junction, Fayette County, Pennsylvania
Date of Construction:	1890s, 1910s, 1918
Present Owner:	Various private owners.
Present Use:	Residences.
Significance:	Most of the houses in Star Junction were built by the Washington Coal & Coke Company in the 1890s. The company operated a coke works and coal mine at Star Junction, which contained nearly 700 inhabitants by 1900. Many of the company-built houses from the 1890s and early 1900s survive.
Historian:	Margaret M. Mulrooney, 1988.

Project Information:

This historical report is an excerpt from a larger study of coal company towns that was published in Margaret M. Mulrooney's, A Legacy of Coal: The Coal Company Towns of Southwestern Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1989). The author wishes to acknowledge the aid of HABS Senior Historian Alison K. Hoagland, who directed the overall effort, and Randall Cooley, Director of America's Industrial Heritage Project, which provided funds for the study. Most importantly, thanks go to the residents of Colver, Windber, and Star Junction, Pennsylvania, who greatly assisted in the preparation of this report. Although the contents of this report have been transmitted to the Library of Congress, research notes, field photos and copies of historic photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AIHP Collection, Special Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

Within the collective moniker "coal towns" their is a smaller subset of communities called "coke towns." This classification includes settlements which not only mined coal, but processed it into coke--a metallurgical fuel. Star Junction is just such a community. But because it is also a coal town, Star Junction possesses many of the characteristic features. For example, the houses are two-story, semi-detached frame structures arranged in grid and linear plans. Yet, as a coke town, Star Junction possessed different features. Pollution of the site, for instance, was much higher than that of a coal town, due to hundreds of coke ovens spewing soot, smoke and sparks into the air. In addition, the ovens were always in blast, emitting noxious fumes and a hazy red glow that was visible for miles. Like most coal towns, houses were built near the work site even though proximity to the ovens meant an increased risk of fire. This also contributed to the shabbier appearance of the houses and their yards. Similarly, the nearby hills were devoid of shrubs and trees; little vegetation could survive such a polluted atmosphere. Despite these problems, Star Junction residents were reasonably content. Star Junction experienced few instances of labor discord because, unlike most coal towns, its workers professed an unusually high degree of loyalty to the company. As the following chapter will illustrate, employees were satisfied with their living conditions because the company maintained a sincerely paternalistic interest in their well-being.

The Company

Coke is a refined form of coal achieved by burning off impurities in the raw mineral in an enclosed oven at intense temperatures. High in carbon content, coke was used chiefly as a fuel in the steel-making process. By the 1840s it was becoming clear that the vast Pittsburgh seam under Southwestern Pennsylvania produced the purest coke in the United States. Many new coke plants arose in Fayette County, congregating especially around the town of Connellsville, where the seam visibly outcropped across the mountainsides. Within a few years the quality and quantity of coke produced here combined to catapult the Connellsville coke region to the forefront of the industry where it would remain for almost a century.

The Star Junction coke plant, lying on the periphery of the Connellsville region, opened in 1893 at the height of the coke industry. The Washington Coal and Coke Company, which operated the plant, was founded by James Cochran of nearby Dawson, Pennsylvania. Cochran, called "Little Jim," was known as one of the greatest pioneers of the coke industry. In 1843, Cochran, his brother Sample, and his Uncle Mordecai became the first persons to sell Connellsville coke outside the region. As such, they are generally credited with starting the demand for Connellsville coke.[1]

Each of the Cochran men went on to establish his own coke plants and towns in Fayette County in the nineteenth century. The works at Star Junction, with its two mines, Washington No. 1 and No. 2, was the last and largest plant Little Jim opened. After his death in 1894, control passed to his son, Philip Galley Cochran. By 1897, the Washington mines were producing more coal--and thus, more coke--than any mines in the area. There were 320 ovens and 668 employees living in 400 company houses.[2] The mines operated almost every day, a rarity, and had a high safety record. By 1914, the Washington #1 and #2 mines ranked 12th and 8th in the state, respectively, for production.[3]

In 1899 Philip Cochran passed away and the administration of his holdings fell to a cousin, Mark Mordecai Cochran. Mark Mordecai had helped organize Washington Coal and Coke back in 1893 and assumed the company presidency until Philip's son, James, could come of age. Young James died of pneumonia in 1901, however, and although ownership of the mines and coke works reverted to Philip's widow, Sara Moore Cochran, Mark Mordecai retained actual control.

Expansion of the Star Junction works continued throughout the early twentieth century with the addition of 600 more ovens. By 1915, there were 999 ovens, just one less than the number taxable by law. For most of the 1910s and 1920s, Washington Coal and Coke ranked second only to the H. C. Frick Coke Company mines for production in their district. But by the 1920s, beehive coke ovens were being phased out and replaced with more efficient by-product ovens. Production at the Washington mines and ovens started to decline. Ironically, the Frick Coke Company, a subsidiary of the U. S. Steel Corporation since 1901 and Washington Coal and Coke's chief competitor, acquired the Star Junction works on July 15, 1930, as part of a large-scale takeover of many smaller plants.[4] It is doubtful that the Star Junction ovens were operated by Frick, although active mining continued until 1954, when U. S. Steel closed all operations. Most of the surface land was sold to investor Mark Sugarman when the mine closed. Sugarman, in turn, sold the houses to private individuals. U. S. Steel still retains the mineral rights.

Planning and Development

Since Star Junction lies on the western edge of the Connellsville coke region, large-scale development did not occur until the 1890s when the beehive coke industry was at its height. In the preceding decades, the area around present-day Star Junction was predominantly agricultural. The largest town, Perryopolis, was a small village of homes and shops grouped around an unusual

Baroque plan. Built on what was once George Washington's largest property outside Virginia, Perryopolis' claim to fame was a large grist mill believed to have been owned by Washington himself. Appropriately enough, the small creek that powered the mill was called Washington Run.

The run begins in the hills south of Perryopolis, but flows in a northern direction through a shallow valley called Stickel Hollow and into town. At Stickel Hollow, less than one mile from Perryopolis' town square, the run is joined by another creek. The site of this junction, located on a level valley floor with a good water supply and a large open space, was ideal for industrial development (Fig. 1). The Washington Coal and Coke Company quickly bought up over 4,000 acres of land and commenced planning a new coke works.[5]

Although Star Junction appears to lack a cohesive town plan, in fact, the arrangement of houses, coke ovens, streets, railroad tracks and tipples was carefully thought out. The location of each had to conform to the natural terrain, yet be organized in the most efficient manner possible. As in most mining towns, the company engineers gave first priority to locating the mine entries, tipples and coke ovens in the middle of the valley bottom. Next, they located the railroad tracks along the valley floor, parallel to Washington Run and the long banks of ovens. Because it was a coke works, the engineers also had to make room for a coke ash dump (the equivalent of a boney pile in a mining town). It was located in the corner of the valley floor along the southeastern hillside. Then, the engineers laid out streets.

Old Pennsylvania Route 51 was laid out as the main north-south thoroughfare. Historically, the road followed the east side of the valley floor between Washington Run and the hillside. At Star Junction, where Stickel Hollow widens for about three-fourths of a mile, the road turned west, crossed the railroad tracks and Washington Run, and turned south again at the base of the opposite hillside. The other major road ran east-west, extending from both sides of the jog in Old Route 51. With all this accomplished, the engineers could lay out building lots on the left-over land.

The intersection where Route 51 turned south was the center of town, evidenced by the public buildings and bosses' houses located there. The Junction House Hotel occupied the northwest corner; the doctor's office and residence the northeast. The company store was on the southeast corner, with the store manager's house across the road. Because the town's two churches were built next to the store manager's house, this section of Old

Route 51 is called Church Street. It is the only named street in Star Junction. The public school was constructed beside the church lots at the base of the hill while the theater building was across the street (Fig. 2).

Washington Coal and Coke built most of the houses in Star Junction during the 1890s. Because of the land configuration, the houses were built in multiple linear units rather than one large development. Since Star Junction did not have street names, the groups of houses were given names instead. For example, Star Junction residents called the group of bosses' houses Tony Row because "that's where the high-toned people lived."[6]

Tony Row was located along the road leading west, away from Church Street. The mine superintendent's house and its neighbor, the fireboss' house, were up on the hill behind the hotel and apart from the other bosses. Most of the coke workers' and coal miners' houses, however, were located on the other side of Washington Run. White Row referred to the white-painted houses along the east-west section of Route 51. Behind it to the south were two shorter, parallel rows also included in White Row. Further south were Red Row and Old Mexico, located between the coke ovens and the ash dump. Sweetcake, another group of houses, was built on the narrow strip of land along Route 51 heading toward Perryopolis (see Fig. 1).

The next building phase did not occur until the 1910s. Called Turkey Knob, it comprised two streets extending northwest from the reservoir beyond White Row to Route 51. New Town was the last section built, in 1918, in a linear pattern along two more streets running in a north-south direction near the reservoir. As with all of Star Junction, Turkey Knob and New Town took their shape from the landscape.

Workers' Housing

Approximately 155 houses are still standing in Star Junction, 136 for miners or coke workers. White Row, Turkey Knob and New Town houses were two-story, semi-detached structures with four rooms per side: parlor, kitchen and two bedrooms. One of the houses in White Row, currently being renovated, provided a great deal of insight into the actual construction of Star Junction's company houses. A typical balloon frame, the walls were composed of continuous 2" x 4" studs. Joists, measuring roughly 2" x 8", were notched at the ends to fit over joist bearers across the front and back of each dwelling. The joists were not continuous

across both rooms, but were also notched to fit over the center partition wall; they are cross-braced. Partition walls were assembled whole from 2" x 4" studs and raised into position after the floorboards were laid. Walls and ceilings were lathed and plastered. Exterior walls were clad with weatherboards and roofs shingled.

While it stood, Red Row consisted of approximately ten four-unit tenements. There was also a ten-unit tenement, called Ten Block, located along Route 51 at the end of Turkey Knob, and another four-unit structure beside the road leading to New Town. It is unusual that there were so many tenements in Star Junction because coal operators considered them an impractical form of housing. Because of the proximity of houses to coke ovens in a coke town, the possibility of a stray spark igniting the roof of a house was particularly high. If the structure were a tenement, the company stood to lose at least four units, if not more. Thus, coal operators generally favored semi-detached houses where the loss would be a maximum of two. Since miners and their families also favored semi-detached units over tenements, this form of housing satisfied employees as well.[7] Helen Davis, a retired Star Junction school teacher and nurse, said "foreigners" occupied the tenements because "they couldn't be too particular."

Old Mexico has been described as "one or two room shanties" by one resident, and as "one-story houses on posts" by another.[8] This group of low-quality houses was inhabited by the company's immigrant bachelor employees. There was also a large boarding house between Old Mexico and the railroad tracks for single foreign men. Old Mexico and the boarding house were demolished in the 1930s.

Like most coal companies, Washington Coal and Coke maintained a full staff of carpenters, plumbers and electricians. These men saw to it that routine repairs and maintenance were performed speedily and regularly. The company painted the exteriors of the houses fairly frequently. Except for Red Row, which was red, all of the houses were white with brown or black trim. Furthermore, every year the company gave each household two sacks of lime for whitewashing the house foundations, tree bases and fences. Inside, most families used wallpaper to brighten what would otherwise be drab little rooms. Employees had to pay for and hang their own wallpaper.[9]

Star Junction houses were heated by coal stoves that the residents purchased themselves. Some families had Heaterolas in the front room, which they used in the winter and stored away in the summer. Each household received one free ton of coal a year

but had to pay for any beyond that amount. A company wagon delivered the coal and dumped it into a bin at the back of the family privy. Oil and kerosene lamps were used for light until the houses were electrified by the company around 1910. Washington Coal and Coke generated its own DC current. Water was hauled from hydrants scattered throughout town. Only the houses in New Town, built in 1918, had an indoor pump at the kitchen sink.[10]

Overcrowding was characteristic of Star Junction workers' houses and reflects a dearth of dwellings. As an example, consider the Rimbars, Holinkas and Ceselkas, three Eastern European immigrant families living in Star Junction in 1910. The Rimbar household consisted of the parents, their two children, and seven boarders--all miners of Magyar decent. Mike Holinka lived with his wife, three children, and fifteen Slovak boarders, including a married couple. All of these men worked in the coke yard. The Ceselkas had four children and eleven boarders; again, all Slovak and all coke-yard workers. These three households are enumerated consecutively on the 1910 census form, indicating that two of the three families lived in the same eight-room, semi-detached house.

Mary Torussio's family can also been seen as typical. Both of her parents came to the United States from Hungary. Her father, Louis Zackal, worked as a miner, and came to the Star Junction works around the turn of the century. When Mary was born in 1910, the family lived in one side of a Turkey Knob house. They moved into a four-room unit in New Town in 1918. Neither of the Zackals spoke English; Torussio said "you didn't need to in order to work there. The kids spoke English for you." And when asked how many kids were in her family, she shrugged her shoulders and guessed: "About fifteen or so."

Similar conditions existed throughout the town because even small households took boarders. Most were single men or married men whose families remained in Europe. Because they were divided into three eight-hour shifts, the men ate and slept in shifts, as well. By boarding with a family, an immigrant could save enough money to send some home, or bring his family here, while the family earned extra money. Many of the immigrant households were so big that people built extra bake ovens in their backyards; neighbors shared the cost and upkeep of the oven. Torussio remembers helping with the baking as a young girl. Twice a week the women would fill the ovens with eight to ten loaves of bread. Larger families naturally baked more often than smaller ones. To further supplement their diet, employees in Star Junction were encouraged to keep gardens and livestock, even though Washington

Coal and Coke sold its own produce, grains and meats in the company store. In fact, Washington Coal and Coke donated the manure from its stables to individuals for fertilizer.

Management Housing

All of Washington Coal and Coke's bosses lived on Tony Row. The "bosses" included the superintendent, the fire boss, the company store manager, the chief of police, the head carpenter, the head blacksmith, both mine foremen, the railroad station agent, and the company time-keeper. They occupied nineteen structures; six were detached and thirteen were semi-detached, for a total of thirty-one dwelling units.

Ada Jones was born and raised on Tony Row. As a child, Jones lived with her mother, two brothers, and an uncle in her maternal grandfathers' house. Her grandfather, Jacob Newmyer, was a cousin of Sarah Cochran. At present, she and her husband live in the old fireboss's house on the hill. This house is identical to her childhood home on Tony Row. Both structures were two-and-a-half-story, five-bay dwellings with cross-gable roofs and rear ells. Each had six rooms: parlor, dining room, and kitchen downstairs, and three bedrooms above. There was also a central stair hall on both floors. Like all of the bosses' houses, they originally had commodes in the cellar and a porcelain sink located in an enclosed pantry built into the kitchen's southern side porch. About 1913, water was piped into Jones's grandparents' house. The company men installed three taps: one for hot water, one for cold and one for reservoir water. Apparently, water from the reservoir was not potable. As to other amenities and services, Jones said that electricity and water were free, and the company paid for and installed the wallpaper she selected.

In addition to the Joneses' present house and Ada Jones's childhood home, there are two other houses with cross-gable roofs. There are also three with plain gable roofs; all seven were identical in plan. The only other detached house on Tony Row is a much later Four-Square. Of the thirteen semi-detached houses, two have cross-gables. Unlike the other eleven, these have eight bays instead of four. Then, too, they probably have six rooms per side, not four.

The company houses that Washington Coal and Coke provided its management personnel were more finished than workers' houses. The kitchens in the detached houses, for example, had built-in cupboards in one corner. The occupant decided how many shelves there would be and whether they should be enclosed. All doors

and windows had bull's-eye moldings; woodwork in the bosses' houses was grained by the company carpenters instead of painted. This included the cupboards, stairs, banisters, doors and moldings. The Joneses' present residence retains its original graining.

Commercial Buildings

Washington Coal and Coke operated its Star Junction store under the name Star Supply Company. The wood-frame building sat on the corner of Old Route 51 and Church Street, the approximate center of town. The original store was a simple, two-story structure. The main facade, with its false front, display windows, and porch faced north. The building also housed the coal company's office, which had a separate entrance.

Residents remember that the store carried a wide variety of goods, including fresh meats, produce, clothing, tools and notions. It also provided services--such as laundry, millinery, and ordering out-of-stock items--and operated its own grist mill. Most local farmers gave the store a percentage of their grain in exchange for milling.[11]

The Star Junction store operated on a system whereby customers could purchase goods with either cash or company-issued money." Washington Coal and Coke's "money" consisted of individual "checks," or slips of paper printed with pre-set amounts ranging from $1 to $5. When an employee requested and received a check, its dollar value was entered next to his name in a ledger. These checks were used in lieu of cash and were honored only by the Star Supply Company. Furthermore, each check was divided into many little squares stamped with smaller increments of 5, 10 or 25 cents. When a customer made a purchase, the check and bill of sale were placed into a wire basket hanging from a system of wires and pulleys, and sent to the office in the back of the store. There, a clerk would punch a hole in the square or squares whose figures equaled the amount of purchase. Any difference was returned to the customer as change.[12] On payday, a company clerk added the checks an employee had received and deducted the total from his wages. The company also provided each employee with a small ledger in which the individual could keep a personal record of the transactions.

Employees patronized other stores, as well. The Victoria Mines Company had a store along Old Route 51 along with a few smaller, private establishments. Perryopolis also had several stores,

including one operated by the Star Supply Company.[13] However, since prices were lower and the location more convenient, most people shopped at the company store.

Star Junction also had its own hotel and theater. The hotel, called the Junction House, was a spacious wood-frame building with a large, ornate, wraparound porch. Built ca. 1895, the hotel was set back from the road across from Tony Row. Company guests and visiting salesmen occasionally stayed there, but for the most part, it operated as a boarding house. Rooms were let to some of the single male employees. In 1900, the hotel had eighteen occupants including the boardinghouse keeper, his wife and six children, a cook, a housekeeper, two bookkeepers, two electricians and three laborers.[14] All were native-born Americans, indicating that the ethnicity of the Junction House boarders was in keeping with the rest of Tony Row. The hotel burned in the early 1930s amid rumors that the fire was a response to the labor dispute of 1932-33.[15]

Star Junction's theater was built ca. 1895 on the lot just south of the company store. It was a simple, two-story, yellow-brick structure with segmental window and door arches. The theater was downstairs; a poolhall, dance hall, and several small lodge rooms were on the upper floor. Washington Coal and Coke subsidized all the entertainment. In the summer, there were operas, plays, recitals and Chatauqua tent shows. Five-cent movies were shown every Wednesday and Saturday during the rest of the year. An advertisement from 1900 proudly stated "Always the Latest and Best Motion Pictures and Photo Plays. Everything New and Up-to-Date." People came from Perryopolis, Victoria, Eckerd and the surrounding countryside to see the shows. The theater building was demolished in 1982.[16]

Institutional Buildings

The Washington Coal and Coke Company recognized the importance of religion to its employees, but its support of Star Junction's various churches differed from denomination to denomination. Star Junction had four churches by 1900: Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and non-denominational; the first three still support active parishes. Many of the Catholics who founded St. John's were of Eastern and Southern European birth, while the Baptists and Methodists were native-born Americans. To the immigrants, religion was a powerful and comforting reminder of the Old Country. Although the company supported the efforts of its foreign employees to establish churches, it reserved financial aid for the Protestant sects.

The oldest congregation belongs to the Star Junction Methodist Church. Philip G. and Sara M. Cochran were staunch supporters of the Methodist faith and contributed generously to local Methodist churches, including this one. The building in Star Junction was financed with their help and dedicated in January 1898. Various additions were made between 1898 and 1909 to house the Sunday school, an auditorium, classrooms and a parsonage.[17]

Star Junction Baptist Church was founded on September 8, 1897, in the front room of Dr. James L. Cochran's house and office. Services were held there until the new wood-frame church was finished. James was a cousin of Philip, and because of his membership, it seems likely that members of the Cochran family helped finance this church, as well. It was dedicated one week before the Methodist Church on January 9, 1898.[18]

Catholics in and around Perryopolis met in a house in Star Junction to hear Mass. They did not make plans to build their own church until 1904, when the small congregation purchased a lot in Victoria for $150 from the Victoria Mines Company. Designed by local architect A. F. Link, the wood-frame building was completed by the following year. The parish, known as St. John the Baptist, also built a rectory and acquired a five-acre cemetery. The wood-frame church was replaced by a new brick structure in the 1970s.

The nondenominational church was also known as the Hungarian Church and sat on the hill beyond White Row. Who built the church is unknown, but it was used primarily by members of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Little else is known about the congregation because it disbanded after 1923.[19]

The company showed its support of the immigrant churches in a subtle manner. For example, it permitted employees to abstain from work on certain holy days, and tolerated the practice of other religious observances. In another instance, Cyril Griglak, who grew up in Star Junction, noted that his family lived in a company house for free because his father played piano at St. John's on Sundays.

Sunday was the traditional day of rest at Star Junction. There was no work except for regular maintenance, which included feeding the mules, pumping water from the mine and keeping the steam generators going. On a typical Sunday, most families went to church. Afterward, the "foreign element" was known to gather at each other's houses for music and dancing; their afternoon was

spent listening to native songs and drinking beer.[20] This day of merrymaking was customary throughout much of the bituminous coal region.

Ethnicity

According to the Federal censuses of 1900 and 1910, most of the Washington Coal and Coke Company's employees were Eastern European. Dominant groups included Magyars (Hungarians), Slovaks and Italians. There were also quite a few native-born Americans. Bosses were always of American or Anglo-Saxon stock. All of the persons interviewed agreed that the nationalities got along very well. There was no segregation of housing, except for Tony Row.

Betty Palonder's father, DeLos Graham, was the coal company's chief office clerk. In that capacity, he was in charge of assigning housing and keeping track of employment and pay records, rent books and store accounts. Periodically, he was sent to New York or Philadelphia to meet new immigrants and send them to Star Junction. Palonder said that her father was known to have altered the spelling of names he found too long or too difficult to pronounce. For the most part, though, the new arrivals did not mind. In fact, Palonder recalled that many were so eager to assimilate into American society that they altered their names themselves. One common practice was to change their surname to the closest American translation.

One seldom finds a black family living in a Southwestern Pennsylvania coal or coke town. There were no blacks in Star Junction, although a few did work there from time to time. The Cochrans decided at some point that no blacks would be permitted to live in Star Junction. Both Frick and Sugarman maintained this practice. To this day, there are no blacks in town. Most of the other area coke towns practiced this exclusion as well. Since many coal operators brought in black miners as scab labor during labor disputes, it is probable that local miners viewed them with distrust and animosity. Local blacks, therefore, settled in Whitsett, a small town to the north of Perryopolis.

Recreation

Recreation in Star Junction did not differ markedly from any other coal or coke town. Washington Coal and Coke sponsored a baseball team, the Tigers, who played as part of Frick's River League. There was a company-built playground and baseball diamond below Turkey Knob where residents would gather for the

big games. In addition, there was a poolhall in the theater building, and another in Sweetcake. For those inclined, there was also a brothel in Sweetcake, although this was kept quiet. Some of the men belonged to fraternal organizations like the Knights of Pythias, Odd-fellows and the Redmen. The Slovak Gymnastic Union Sokol #127 was also active and participated in county and state competitions. In the summer, employees went to Crabapple Lake, which the company owned, for swimming and boating. In the winter, they ice skated at the reservoir. Weddings were another great source of entertainment, especially the ones that lasted for several days! One resident noted that the only time a policeman was needed in Star Junction was "when the foreigners had a wedding."[21]

There were dances, too, such as high school proms and parties held upstairs in a room over the theater. Molinero, the town shoemaker, led the Wombat Syncopaters, a favorite local band.[22] In the 1910s other dances were held in a hall in the basement of the Hungarian Church. Everyone in town participated regardless of nationality. Mary Torrussio explained that before the dance began, strands of fresh fruit were strung across the ceiling. During the festivities, a young man might ask the lady of his choice to pick a piece of fruit for him. But because the ceiling was high, the Romeo in question was required to lift the young woman in his arms. By permitting or refusing such close contact, the lady would reveal her interest or disinterest in the prospective suitor. This courtship ritual ended when the church was torn down in 1923.

Labor Relations

Labor disputes were a significant, but infrequent, aspect of Star Junction's history. When the Star Junction plant opened in 1893, the United States was in the midst of a nationwide depression. In response to the economic situation, many mines in the Connellsville region were closed or operating at a reduced scale. At the same time, coal operators slashed wages to minimize their losses. Area miners bargained for a sliding wage scale, but meeting no response from their employers, decided to strike.

When the Fayette County miners went on strike, both Washington mines were operating on a normal production schedule and all of the ovens were in blast. Working full-time and making good money, Star Junction men had little need for a sliding scale. Since the Washington works was large and employed many men, it was seen as a central weak spot in the striking miners' plan. Thus, closing the Star Junction mines became a prime directive.

On May 23, 1893, over 400 striking miners descended upon Stickel Hollow to convince the Washington men to strike. It was intended to be an orderly gathering, but most of the Star Junction miners refused to participate, insisting that their wages were secure. Undaunted, the strikers camped out around the town. The next morning the miners came out of their houses intending to enter the mines, but were warned away by strikers. Specially appointed company deputies arrived to escort the men into the mines but were met by armed resistance. The deputies responded by firing on the strikers and killing four men.[23] The strikers dispersed and the Washington miners went back to work.

The next strike did not occur until 1922, when the Washington men walked out on their own accord. However, evidence indicates that the Washington men did not unanimously support the strike. The nationwide strike of 1922 was the worst in the history of the bituminous industry--more than 1,807 separate strikes occurred in Pennsylvania alone.[24] Connellsville was one of the strongest union centers in the state. Located less than fifteen miles north, Star Junction was undoubtedly swayed by its influence.

Most of the persons interviewed pointed to the strike of 1932-33 as the only real labor dispute the town encountered. Under the Cochrans' leadership, Star Junction miners and coke workers were reasonably content. The company consistently maintained wages, rents were low, and a general feeling of true paternalism pervaded. Ada Jones was quick to note that during the Depression, the company "carried every man." Each family continued to make purchases at the store on credit and when the Depression seemed over and production back to normal, the accounts were waived. Loyalty to Washington Coal and Coke, and the Cochrans in particular, remained fairly high throughout their ownership of the town and works. But when H. C. Frick Coke Company acquired the works in 1930, labor problems started in earnest.

The Frick Coke Company allowed its employees to participate in a "brotherhood union." That is, employees had representation in a company-controlled union but could not join a national organization like the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). When it took over the Star Junction works, Frick fully expected the men to join the brotherhood. Many did, but others refused, realizing that Frick's brotherhood union offered little protection from wage cuts. Frick officials prohibited the men from seeking representation in the national union with the result that Star Junction men went on strike in 1932. Strikers blocked the roads and threatened scabs with violence. Frick ordered its company police to escort strikebreakers into the mine and called

in the state militia to keep order, but shooting broke out nonetheless. Helen Davis recalled, "We were afraid during all the shooting." The strike went on throughout 1933 and into 1934, ending only when Frick officials agreed to sign a contract with the miners and the UMWA.[25]

Past to Present

Many changes have occurred in Star Junction since the mines ceased operating in the 1950s. One of the most obvious is the dramatic alteration of the company houses. Under Washington Coal and Coke ownership all of the houses bore a striking resemblance to each other whether semi-detached, detached or tenement. Alterations began in the 1930s when H. C. Frick Coke Company applied asbestos shingles to the houses in various shades of "ugly red, green and brown."[27] Around the same time, Frick ordered the demolition of Red Row and Old Mexico. Sweetcake also disappeared. By the end of World War II, most of the surviving houses had been bought by private individuals. Not surprisingly, owners immediately began altering the company houses by adding bathrooms, changing windows and applying new siding. Many of the semi-detached houses were made into single-family residences during this period.

The character of the town has changed since the houses were sold in the 1950s, mostly because of shifts in residency as old-timers were replaced by newcomers. The company store was turned over to a cabinet manufacturer and the school and theater were demolished. A four-lane highway was built along the old railroad grade and now bisects the town. The intersection of this highway (Route 51) and Old Route 51 is marked by a stoplight, a gas station and a video store. Yet, despite these modern intrusions, vestiges of the vanished industry remain: the power house and a few ovens on the west side of Route 51 just south of town. Studied in conjunction with the churches, the store, the plan and the many houses, Star Junction provided an exceptional opportunity to study everyday life in the coke region of Southwestern Pennsylvania between 1880 and 1930.

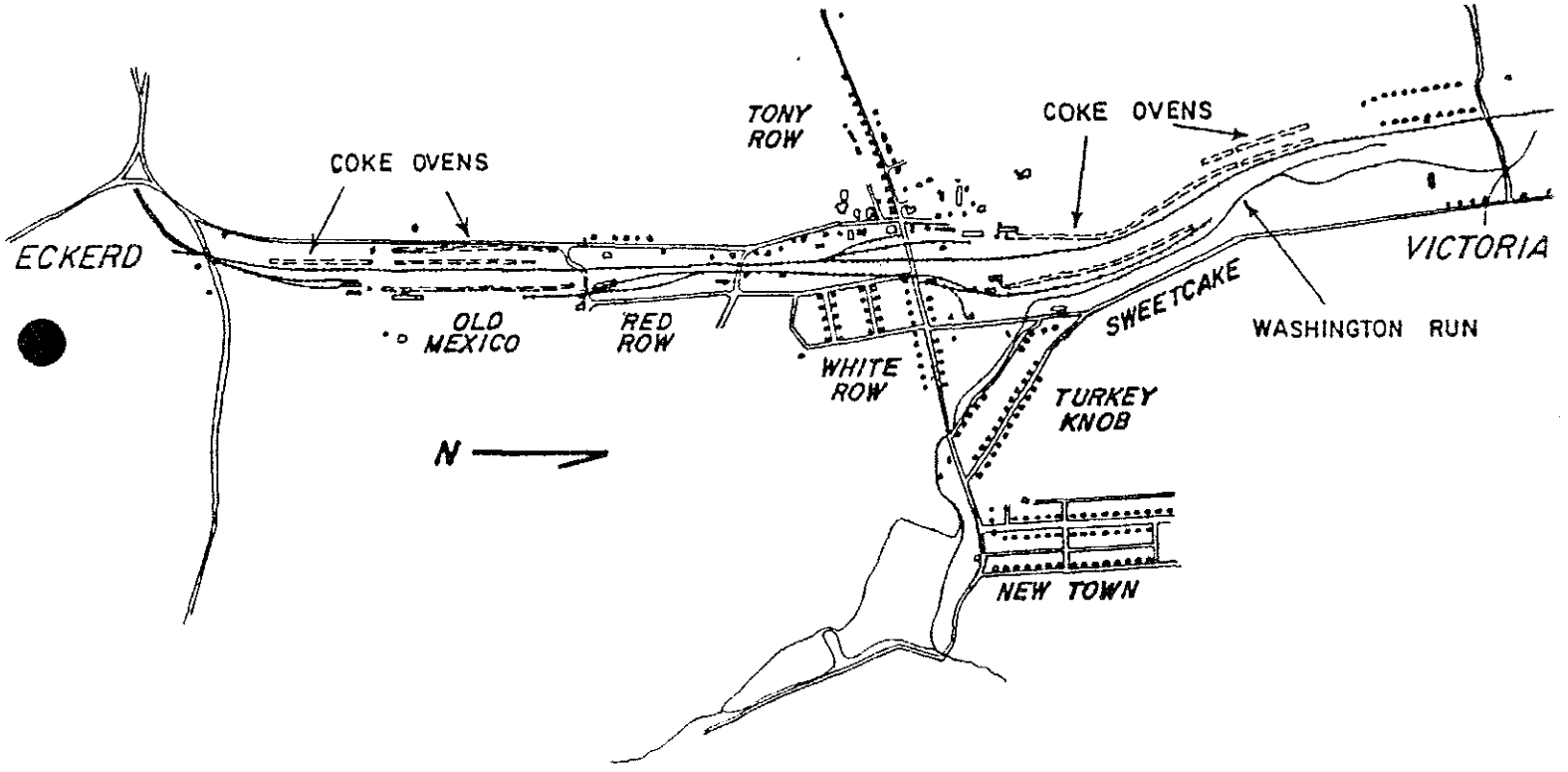

Figure 1. Map of Star Junction, ca. 1920. Adapted by author from a map entitled "Surface Tracts of the U.S. Steel Corporation," 1930. Courtesy of Tony Grazziano, U.S. Steel Mining Office.

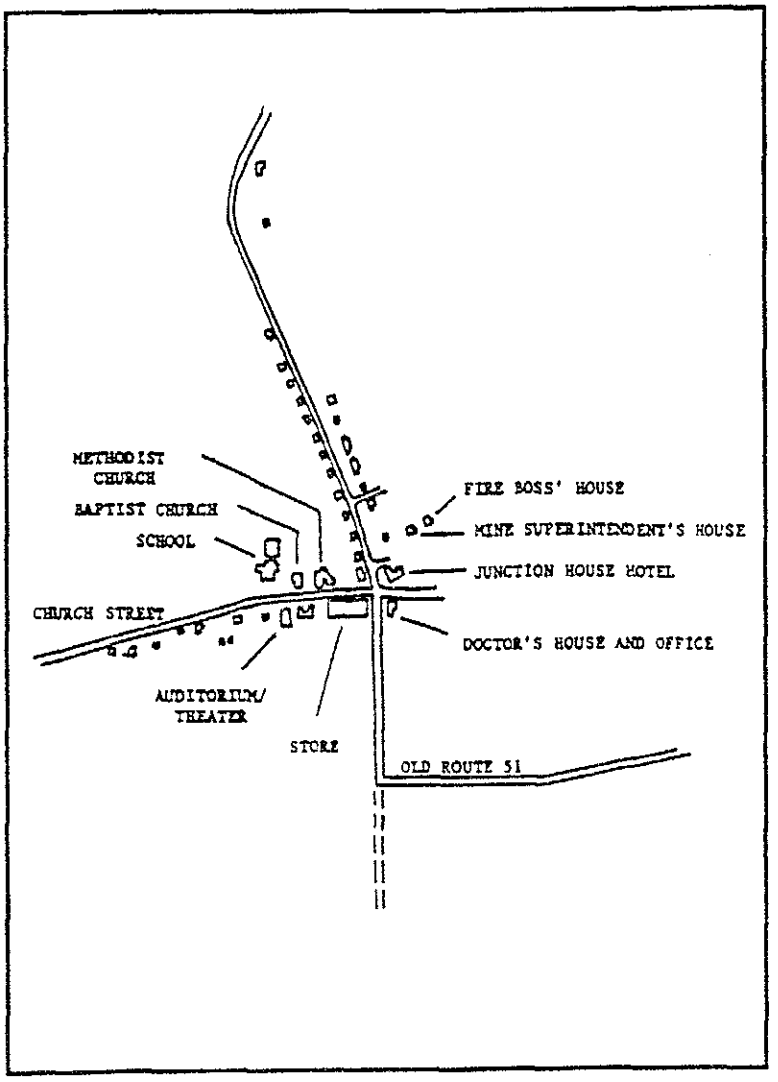

Figure 2. The town center of Star Junction, showing the proximity of management housing to public buildings. Adapted by author from a map entitled "Surface Tracts of the U.S. Steel Corporation," 1930.

ENDNOTES

[1]George P. Donehoo, ed., Pennsylvania - A History (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1926), 243.

[2]From the number of houses remaining and historic photographs and interviews, it appears that there were probably 400 housing units, not 400 separate buildings. S. B. Nelson, Nelson's Biographical Dictionary and Historical Reference Book of Fayette County, Pennsylvania (Uniontown: S. B. Nelson, 1900), 436.

[3]Department of Internal Affairs of Pennsylvania, Report of the Bureau of Mines (Harrisburg: State Printing Office, 1899), 358; Coal Age 5, no. 25 (20 July 1914).

[4]Company Literature, U. S. Steel Mining Office, Washington, Pennsylvania. Courtesy of Tony Grazziano, 17 March 1988.

[5]Nelson, 436.

[6]Cyril Griglack, interview by author, 14 July 1988, Perryopolis; Betty Palonder, interview by author, 14 July 1988, Perryopolis; Helen Davis, interview by author, 13 April 1988, Uniontown.

[7]John Aubrey Enman, "The Relationship of Coal Mining and Coke Making to the Distribution of Population Agglomerations in the Connellsville (PA) Beehive Coke Region" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1962), 200.

[8]Mike Torvish, interview by author, 28 April 1988, Star Junction; Walter Woodward, interview by author, 12 April 1988, Smock.

[9]Woodward; Torvish; Ada Jones, interview by author, 13 April 1988, Star Junction; Mary Torussio, interview by author, 29 April 1988, Star Junction; Mary Easter, interview by author, 28 April 1988, Star Junction.

[10]Rita Balentine, interview by author, 13 April 1988, Star Junction; Torussio; Jones; Woodward.

[11]Jones.

[12]Jones; Palonder.

[13]Souvenir, Perryopolis Centennial (Perryopolis, July 1914), advertisement.

[14]U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Enumeration District 52, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, 1900. Microfilm, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

[15]Griglack.

[16]Souvenir, Perryopolis Sesquicentennial Celebration (Perryopolis, 1964), 49.

[17]Ibid., 48.

[18]Ibid., 46-47.

[19]Davis.

[20]For more information on the drinking habits of coal miners and laborers see: Dennis F. Brestensky, Evelyn A. Hovanec, and Albert N. Skomra, Patchwork/Voices (Pittsburgh: University Center for International Studies Publication Section, University of Pittsburgh, 1978); Thomas Coode, Bugdust and Blackdamp: Life and Work in the Old Coal Patch (Comart Press, 1986); and Herbert Gutman, Work, Culture and Society (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 37.

[21]Griglack; Woodward.

[22]Palonder; Clyde Wells, interview by author, 12 April 1988, Star Junction.

[23]Muriel Early Sheppard, Cloud by Day (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 44-55.

[24]Jeremiah Patrick Shalloo, Private Police, With Special Reference to Pennsylvania (Concord, N.H.: Rumford Press, 1933), 93.

[25]Pete Rebottini. Interview by author, 8 September 1988. As part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs, Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act in the spring of 1933 which recognized and guaranteed the right of American workers to form unions and engage in collective bargaining with their employers. Only two days after Congress passed the act, over 50,000 miners in Fayette County, alone, joined the UMWA. In September, the Appalachian Agreement was signed into effect and made provisions

for a forty-hour week and a minimum wage. Importantly for miners, the agreement also abolished child labor, scrip wages and the enforced patronage of company stores. For more information see Coode, 102-123.

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Photographs

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Palonder, Perryopolis, PA.:

1.) View of Victoria showing company houses.
2.) View of Washington No. 2 power house showing tipple, conveyors and ovens.
3.) Star Junction public school.
4.) View of Victoria.
5.) Interior view of butcher shop in Star Junction company store.
6.) Interior view of linen shop in Star Junction company store.
7.) Church Street, Star Junction.
8.) Junction House Hotel.
9.) Rear view of Delos Graham house on Tony Row.
10.) Company store and office showing men getting paychecks.
11.) Washington No. 2 tipple.
12.) Company store, front elevation.
13.) A workers' house in New Town.
14.) A street in New Town.

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Woodward, Smock, Pa.:

1.) Baseball player, Star Junction team.
2.) Star Junction residents going to the reservoir; shows company houses in background.
3.) Jennie Baughman and Vinnie Howarth standing in front of an outdoor pump.
4.) Washington No. 2 mine.
5.) Howarth family, 1900.
6.) Howarth family and Aunt Sara, 1900.

Maps

"Surface Tracts of United States Steel Corporation at Washington Works, Situate in Perry, Franklin and Jefferson Townships, Fayette County, Penna.," no. 79A (26 August 1930). Courtesy of Tony Grazziano, U. S. Steel Mining Office, Washington, PA.

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